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Pakistan: Zia's Position
Talking Points for the DCI
19 January 1984

We believe that President Zia-ul Haq will remain in office into 1985 despite the threat of serious domestic unrest, growing tensions with India, and continued pressure from the Soviets in Afghanistan.

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Zia plans to establish a civilian government by March 1985.

-- He wants to hold a nonparty election, to exclude many of former Prime Minister Bhutto's followers from the government and to give the military some sort of constitutional veto.

-- He is reluctant to compromise because he believes these restrictions are needed to keep Pakistan on the right track.

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The politicians in Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party believe, correctly in our view, that they would gain control in an open election.

-- The PPP is the single strongest party in Pakistan and the dominant member of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, a multiparty anti-Zia alliance.

-- Party leaders hope to create civil disorders that will either force Zia to change his plans or cause the Army to remove Zia and negotiate a political compromise.

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Zia appears to have the upper hand for now.

-- He showed he can cope with serious disorders when disturbances erupted in Sind, the second most populous province, last August.

-- The military backs him strongly and won't move against him unless serious trouble breaks out in the Punjab, the home province of most of the Army.

-- Punjabis may not want to endanger the prosperity they have had under Zia by taking to the streets. The PPP is

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strongest in rural areas, not in Punjabi cities where demonstrations would have more impact. []

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There are opportunities for Zia to exploit differences among Pakistan's politicians.

-- Some moderates know they would do better under Zia than under a PPP government and are open to deals.

-- Some parties in the MRD are reluctant to cooperate with the PPP out of concern that the PPP won't share power with them.

-- Zia's recent decision to allow Bhutto's daughter Benazir to leave Pakistan might open the way for some form of accommodation between the regime and moderates in Bhuttos's party. []

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These advantages do not guarantee Zia victory.

-- Zia does not have strong popular support. Pakistanis who back his regime do so because they see the alternatives as worse.

-- Rising food prices and a poor cotton crop are eroding the prosperity that accompanied military rule.

-- Zia will move carefully but a small mistake could bring a disproportionate reaction. Minor incidents have lead to widespread violence in Pakistani cities. []

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Foreign policy issues may become more difficult for Zia.

-- Statements by Pakistani and Indian leaders and mutual suspicions that each country is fomenting dissidence in the other are worsening relations. []

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-- Adding to tensions are Indian concern that Pakistan will develop a nuclear weapon, worries in both countries about arms acquisitions by the other, and longstanding differences such as the dispute about Kashmir.

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-- Pakistan probably will not acquire sufficient fissile material to conduct a test in the next two years. []

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We see nothing to suggest that Afghanistan will become a more serious problem for Pakistan this year.

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- Moscow will continue to press Islamabad to stop supporting the insurgents, and Pakistan will still have to care for more than 2 million refugees.
- A new round of indirect negotiations sponsored by the UN is to begin in March, but we see no sign that either Islamabad or Moscow is ready to compromise on key issues such as the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

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